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SUBJECT: U/SYG HOLMES BRIEFS THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON HIS  
TRIP TO SRI LANKA

REF: USUN 192

¶1. (SBU) Summary: U/SYG for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes briefed the Security Council February 27 on the situation in northern Sri Lanka and his recent visit there. He said civilians in the LTTE-controlled area are in "very great danger" and there are strong anecdotal reports that they are being prevented physically from leaving the area. He said the government of Sri Lanka has improved access to IDP camps and has begun to allow UNHCR to monitor the screening process for civilians leaving the LTTE-controlled area. All Council members supported the UN's work as well as the personal engagement of the Secretary-General and U/SYG Holmes. Although Council members agreed that the Japanese, as President of the Council, could brief the press on the meeting, several countries - Russia, China, Vietnam, Libya and Turkey - emphasized that the press remarks be simple, factual and clearly state that Sri Lanka will not be a recurring agenda item for the Security Council. End summary.

U/SYG HOLMES BRIEFS

¶2. (SBU) Holmes said he met with high-level government officials, including the President, UN staff, the Co-Chairs, and key donor countries during his recent visit to Sri Lanka. His goal was to obtain first-hand information on the humanitarian crisis in the north, as well as to promote compliance with international humanitarian law. He visited IDP camps in Vavuniya, and said that basic humanitarian needs of the IDPs are being met despite overcrowding. However, he criticized the severe restrictions on IDP movements into and out of the camps. This included family members of IDPs, who are not allowed entry into the camps. He raised the issue of IDP movement with government officials, and was told that they will allow increased mobility once temporary ID cards have been issued to the IDPs. Government officials also stated that they hoped to have 80 percent of the IDPs resettled or returned to their homes by the end of 2009. Holmes said government reasons for delaying full movement were understandable given security concerns, although the UN would watch carefully to ensure that the government fulfills its promises regarding the IDPs.

¶3. (SBU) Turning to the situation within the LTTE-controlled area, Holmes said information was scarce, but the risk of a bloody end to the conflict was "unacceptably high." Although the government claims to have stopped using heavy weapons in order to minimize harm to civilians, it was not clear whether this was actually being done. Holmes said he "desperately hoped" that the LTTE would let civilians leave, and he asked countries that have influence with the LTTE to press them on this point. He urged the government to tackle the underlying political issues as this decades-long conflict comes to a close. Holmes ended by emphasizing that he and the Secretary-General will continue to closely monitor the situation.

## SECURITY COUNCIL MEMBERS REACT

¶4. (SBU) Council members agreed on the following points: to support the sovereign government of Sri Lanka and to call upon the LTTE to lay down their arms and allow civilians to leave the affected area. Council members also emphasized their preoccupation and concern regarding the humanitarian situation, and called for the full respect of international humanitarian law. Several countries - France, Costa Rica and Austria - asked about the situation regarding children in armed conflict. Holmes replied that anecdotal reports from within the LTTE-controlled zone indicate that the LTTE have increased their forced recruitment of civilians, including children. (Note: NGOs such as CARE and Watchlist have suggested sending the Security Council's Children and Armed Conflict Working Group on a visit to Sri Lanka. The UN's office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict opposes this idea, and prefers a lower-key approach. End note)

¶5. (SBU) Ambassador DiCarlo expressed the USG's deep concern regarding the humanitarian situation, called for maximum restraint by both sides as well as access by the ICRC to the government's registration and screening process. In response to her questions, Holmes said that at the moment, he did not have concerns about treatment in the IDP camps; his concerns focused on the severe restrictions to their movement and the heavy military presence within the camps. He had received assurances from the government that they would improve both of these situations. Regarding ICRC access to the government's registration and screening process, the government was allowing UNHCR full access but not the ICRC, said Holmes. The government would not grant access to the

ICRC because they did not want to give the impression that the line between the government and LTTE-controlled areas was an international border.

¶6. (SBU) Council members agreed that Japanese PR Takasu, this month's President of the Security Council, should brief the media on the meeting. Russia, China, Turkey, Vietnam and Libya all emphasized that Takasu's statement should be factual and underscore that Sri Lanka would not be a recurring agenda item of the Security Council, and the necessity of any future briefings would be decided on a case-by-case basis.  
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